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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BRUSSELS 000248

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SUBJECT: DELIVERY OF DEMARCHE ON U.S. PLANS FOR MARCH 2
CONFERENCE

REF: STATE 14575

Classified By: USEU Political M-C Chris Davis for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Drawing on Reftel points USEU discussed the March 2 donors' conference with EU officials and representatives of the Czech and Norwegian missions in Brussels, as well as with the EU's humanitarian aid organization, ECHO. According to our interlocutors, Javier Solana, Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, the Czech foreign minister (the current EU presidency), senior officials from ECHO, and numerous EU foreign ministers and officials will be present. Most are focused on humanitarian assistance, but there is also discussion of how to proceed politically should any caretaker government include Hamas. The head of EU's Middle East office also raised concern that conference achieve concrete results, which he fears might be difficult if there is not a durable cease-fire in place by the time the conference takes place. There continues to be discussion of what to do should Hamas join a caretaker government but not adopt Quartet principles. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Deputy Political Counselor delivered reftel demarche February 18 to Wolfgang Barwinkel, Director of the Middle East office in the Middle East/North Africa Unit at the Council. Deputy PolCouns reviewed objectives with Barwinkel, stressing that we believed it important that the conference strengthen the Palestinian Authority and that it focus initially on meeting immediate humanitarian needs. After listening to the overall demarche, Barwinkel raised a number of concerns that he said were in part his own thinking and in part a reflection of discussions going on within the Council and among member states. He said he feared the conference as conceived had a "very high risk" of not having a concrete result. He expressed pleasure at the announcement that Secretary Clinton and Special Envoy Mitchell would be attending, and said that Javier Solana and the Czech Foreign Minister (as EU presidency) would also attend. He said the European Commission would be represented by Benita Ferrero-Waldner (and possibly development commissioner Louis Michel) and "an army of foreign ministers." He expressed concern, however, about announcements that Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi and French President Nicholas Sarkozy would also attend with unclear roles.

¶3. (C) Barwinkel said there was praise for Egypt for coming forward to host the conference, but noted that the Egyptians, in their invitation referred to both humanitarian assistance

and development assistance. There was concern that it would not be possible to move forward on development assistance until there was an agreed cease-fire and a "recipient"--that is, an agreed Palestinian government. There was worry among some in the EU that these goals could not be reached before the conference, raising questions about what could be accomplished. He emphasized that "the EU is all for empowering the Palestinian Authority." Planning was going forward on assistance. The EU will remain a leading donor to the Palestinians. He said the European Commission would press at the conference that the EU's PEGASE mechanism remain in place as a leading mechanism for channeling assistance.

¶4. (C) Barwinkel asked whether U.S. goals for the conference might evolve toward a greater emphasis on development assistance should there be an agreed cease-fire and caretaker government before March 2. He also asked whether there was any thinking in Washington of flexibility in conditions should the Egyptians come up with an agreement among the Palestinians that leads to a caretaker government involving Hamas or members from Hamas. Poloff reiterated reftel reaffirmation of our commitment to working with a PA that rejects violence, recognizes Israel's right to exist, and engages with Israel on the basis of past agreements. Barwinkel said that is also the EU's position and the position of most member states, but noted that there is considerable debate among member states and within the Council, with many voices arguing that Hamas is a fact on the ground and will eventually have to be brought in to any Palestinian government.

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¶5. (C) Charge also delivered demarche to the Czech Political and Security Committee (PSC) Ambassador Ivo Sramek, who emphasized the importance of the issues to the Czech presidency and noted that the Mission had brought on a respected Middle East expert, Ambassador Tomas Smetanka, to handle the issues. In a separate conversation with Smetanka, Deputy PolCouns reiterated points. Smetanka noted the Czechs would like to do a Quartet meeting on the margins of the March 2 event. He said that although the Russian Foreign Minister will not be present, the special envoy for the Middle East will and that would be adequate. Smetanka said that the issue of Gaza and the peace process would be on the agenda for the upcoming Foreign Ministers meeting (GAERC), but that no formal conclusions would be adopted.

¶6. (C) The Norwegian Mission to the EU First Secretary responsible for Middle East issues, Tor Kinsarvik, told us separately that Norway was happy to see the U.S. continued to call for a follow-up meeting of the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee (AHLIC) and also hoped to keep the issues of humanitarian support separate from broader reconstruction and development. However, Norway would likely take a different approach toward the potential presence of Hamas in any caretaker government, as it did in 2007. Kinsarvik said Norway felt it "unrealistic" to expect Hamas to sign on explicitly to Quartet principles and that it would be acceptable to Norway if Hamas expresses adherence to agreements previously signed by the PLO, which Norway would see as indirectly accepting Quartet principles. He said that, from his conversations, there are several countries in the EU open to such an approach to any caretaker government that included Hamas, naming France, Spain, and possibly Sweden.

¶7. (U) The European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Organization (ECHO) told us that ECHO had not finalized its plans for the conference because it did not yet have an agenda. ECHO would like to see a window for discussing humanitarian issues during the conference's afternoon session. ECHO is planning on sending either Steffen Stenberg (the Director of Operations) or Peter Zangl (the Director General for Humanitarian Aid). If there is no window for discussing humanitarian issues, ECHO will focus on trying to make sure there is a separation of humanitarian issues from

political issues. ECHO's main goals are to make sure humanitarian aid can flow without restrictions and to promote cooperation among all actors on the humanitarian side. ECHO will meet February 24 to finalize goals.

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